

## **Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Meeting Minutes, April 2, 2015**

Attending: Rodney Barker, Bob Burke, Barbara Darnell, Steven Feinstein, Groot Gregory, Ron Mauri, Carol McPherson, Srdj Nedeljkovic, Robert Solomon

Ex Officio Aldermen: John Rice

### **Guests:**

Karen Bray, Village Day  
Per Dutton, 143 Lincoln Street Development Concerns  
Rena Getz, Waban Neighborhood Area Council  
Mildred Hutchinson, Lincoln Street  
Dianne Khalaj, Newton Highlands Merchants Association  
George Mansfield, Former Alderman, Ward 6  
Larry Rosenberg, 143 Lincoln Street Development Concerns  
Ben Siegel, 143 Lincoln Street Development Concerns  
Julius Starkman, Boylston Street  
Chris Steele, Newton Economic Development Commission

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Srdj called the meeting to order at 7:40 PM and determined that we had a quorum to conduct business.

The minutes for the March meeting were recorded on tape by Rena Getz. Bob will contact Rena for details.

The Treasurer's Report included the following. As of March 31, 2015, we had \$5,678.84 in our accounts, but only \$2,228.84 is currently available. That is because certain financial transactions involving the remaining amount are still pending. These include:

\$ 800.00 for skating rink expenses  
\$ 150.00 pending for Gretchen Schuler for expenses related to NH Local Historic District planning.  
\$2,500.00 pending for garden and bridge projects at Walnut Street Bridge.

Financial issues related to Village Day were postponed until later in the meeting.

The following items were discussed:

### **Area Council Boundaries**

Srdj reported that the Program and Services Committee finally approved modest additions to our service area of streets that were found to be omitted within our boundary zone and also in areas adjacent to our prior boundary zone. It will be recalled that signatures were collected from these streets in late 2014. These include homes on Boylston Road, Richardson Road, Andrew Street, and up to Beacon Street on the northern extent of our zone.

The vote had been scheduled for February, but it will be recalled that the Program and Services Committee decided held the vote for one month until David Olsen could rule on a few items including specifics of a resolution of the issue of parts of Winslow Road and Puritan Street. The Waban and Highlands Area Councils resolved this issue amicably and with comity such that residents on sections of those two roads may have the option of joining either area council.

### **143 Lincoln Street**

Ron updated the Council on the situation involving the request by a developer for a “special permit” from the Board of Aldermen to transform a nonconforming two-family dwelling at 143 Lincoln Street into two attached dwellings that would exceed allowed FAR requirements. The matter was again before the Board’s Land Use Committee in March and Ron pointed out that the current version by the developer exceeds FAR.

Srdj stated that the current proposal by the developer continues to exceed what is allowed by current zoning statute and that neighbors to the project are in favor of reducing the mass of the proposed development in order to protect the character of the neighborhood. Seven or eight homeowners near the development are opposed to the project in its present form. Srdj added that allowing this development to proceed in its current form may set a precedent for other large projects that exceed zoning requirements to be approved throughout the Highlands. This would almost certainly change the character of our village.

Rodney concurred that this would set a unwelcome precedent for future development in the Highlands. The developer is seeking a “special permit”, but a special permit is only supposed to be granted when a project is in the “public interest”. How this project meets the “public interest” is unclear in this case according to Rodney.

Ben Siegel and Larry Rosenberg have homes next to or adjacent to 143 Lincoln Street. Their immediate concern is that they have not been able to examine certain size modifications the developer has claimed he has made to the development plans for 143 Lincoln Street.

Rodney stated that this was “intolerable” and moved that a letter be drafted to the Board of Aldermen stating that:

1. We are not satisfied that a special permit should be awarded for this project because it is not at all clear that it is in the public interest of immediate neighbors or the Village as a whole.
2. We implore the Land Use Committee not to approve any plan that has not been fully reviewed by immediate neighbors and the Village as a whole.

John Rice stated that he would facilitate submission of this resolution as two letters. He also reported that he and Alderman Yates were greatly involved on this issue and would ensure that the neighbors of 143 Lincoln Street had adequate opportunity to examine, comment on and, if necessary, contest the developer’s revised plan for the property.

The Council approved Rodney’s motion 8-0.

### **Proposal for a Local Historical District**

Rodney and Bob continued the discussion on the proposed Local Historic District. It will be recalled that a community meeting that had initially been scheduled for Sunday, February 8<sup>th</sup> had to be postponed because of a snow storm. We are probably going to reschedule this meeting for Sunday, May 31<sup>st</sup> since this is the only time that John believes the Hyde Center will be available for a Sunday event.

The February meeting had received wide notice because the announcement and purpose of the meeting was described at length in the printed January Hyde Village newsletter that goes to every home in the Highlands. John stated that he could put a brief item about the time and place for the May meeting in the upcoming printed newsletter, but that there wasn’t any room to spell out much detail. Bob announced that he would draft an announcement letter about the May meeting that would be hand delivered by volunteers to the 240 or so homes on streets that would likely be included in any approved Local Historic District. A press release for the Tab and Boston Globe will also be drafted and short pieces will also appear on all City blogs and on various email discussion groups.

Rodney noted that Gretchen Schuler still had not received a check for the \$200.00 that was approved for payment at our February meeting. Rodney asked that the Council vote to approve this amount. A motion was moved to this effect, seconded and approved on a vote of 7-1-1.

Carol briefed the Council on an excellent set of booklets about historically significant homes in Newton Highlands and Waban that was produced by the City during the late 1970's. Several members were unaware of their existence. Carol stated that we should make a special effort to ensure that all of them are preserved and that landmark designation be considered where needed to guarantee protection.

### **Village Day Activities**

Steve Feinstein updated the Council on developing needed plans and projects to put a successful Village Day together. A planning meeting involving several members of the community will be held this month. It is still a work in progress and Steve reported that it was going to take considerable dexterity to acquire and allocate funds for the various projects. Karen Bray presented a concept for a performance dance that she would organize for Village Day.

Srdj proposed that the Area Council authorize Steve Feinstein to spend up to \$2,000 of existing funds without requiring the full Area Council to convene and approve each individual item that needed immediate funding to advance the various Village Day activities. Spending requests would still need to be reviewed by Groot and Srdj to insure that there was consensus that these requests were consistent with our financial situation and spending goals. If any new funds are raised specifically for Village Day, these funds may be spent to further the mission of making Village Day a successful event.

The motion was seconded and carried on a vote of 7-0-1.

### **Ice Rink**

John reported that a bill for \$500.00 to cover final expenses for the ice rink is pending and he will send it to the Council when he receives it.

### **March Meeting with School Committee Members from the Highlands**

Rodney stated he thought the session with the Ward 5, 6 and 8 School Committees at last month's meeting was highly informative. Other Council members

concurred that the meeting was very worthwhile. Apparently, draft plans have been developed for redistricting that involve Newton Highlands. When these plans are available, they will be disseminated to Area Council members for review.

### **Merchants Update**

Diane and Chris Steele reported on new business activity in the Village and plans involving the City and Newton Needham Chamber of Commerce to host a “Cash Mob” in Newton Highlands Village on Saturday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>. The idea is to get 100 or more people who will show up ready to spend at least \$10.00 at one or more of our village businesses. Council members voiced strong support for this program and a willingness to participate.

### **Economic Development**

Chris also reported on several initiatives that are certain to effect village development in the years ahead. He noted the pending conclusion of Phase I Zoning Reform which has been basically a two year study to determine what is in the current zoning documents. This should set the stage for Phase II activities that will actually grapple with what could be significant changes to the City’s zoning regulations to clarify and modernize the way zoning is done in Newton. Other developments noted by Chris include the advancement of the City’s Economic Development Plan and strategies for commercial development in village centers.

### **Highlands MBTA Update**

Robert and Groot announced that the community meeting on handicapped and other upgrades at the Newton Highlands MBTA Station would take place sometime in the spring. Groot also announced that he, Barbara and Robert would be meeting with the MBTA’s Bill McClellan in late April to finalize arrangement and would have a full report for the Council at our May meeting.

### **Transportation Update**

Newton Transportation Director William Paille is scheduled to attend our May meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Burke, Secretary,  
Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council